

Excerpt from *Action Plan for High Blood Pressure*, by Jon Divine, MD
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Action Plan for High Blood Pressure

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Maintaining an Active Lifestyle and Having Fun With Fitness
From Chapter 2: Conquering Hypertension With Exercise

In addition to maintaining an exercise program, it is important to adopt an active lifestyle. Simple daily activities such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking farther away from the entrance of a store, and choosing hobbies that promote movement and physical activity all will contribute positively to your blood pressure reduction program. Taking public transportation, cycling, and walking when you can tend to increase activity more than driving your own vehicle where you want to go.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to maintain an active lifestyle when time is at a premium. Nowhere is this reality more evident than in our daily grind back and forth to work. One of the reasons Houston was selected as a “fat city” was the amount of commute time, which takes away from daily exercise time. Certainly, our sprawling cities increase the amount of time we are behind the wheel. The added commute time requirement certainly forces us to be more creative in choosing when and where to exercise. If your schedule is flexible, avoiding the typical daily rush hours can add time to your day. Exercise before or after work at a facility on or near your worksite to avoid at least one leg of the daily rush hours. Break times and lunch hours are an ideal time to add a 20-minute walk to your day.

Enjoy it; play at it. Fitness for the sake of fitness is boring for some. The drudgery of going to the gym every day soon after making those New Year’s resolutions has been the undoing of many a good intention. To be successful in your fitness goals, exercise needs to become something you really enjoy doing. Children play every day because they enjoy it. Couldn’t we adapt the same idea with exercise? Whether it is the new bike we love to ride, our workout buddies we enjoy spending time with, or the idea of trying to improve each aspect of our game, all these features of a regular fitness program will make it fun. When exercise becomes play, it automatically becomes a priority in our daily schedule.

Even the most fun game can become boring, so it is also important to vary activity in order for it to remain fun. Varying activities helps your body to train in different ways and your mind to continue to enjoy what you are doing. If you belong to a gym, don't go to the same class five times a week and ignore the lap pool. Devout runners and cyclists should vary their route, pace, and distance. Variety will help you maintain your interests and, ultimately, your health.

Don't forget who you play with. A common method of improving exercise adherence and making the workout more fun is to involve a training partner or two. The attraction of team sports for many is the opportunity for regular social interaction. Going at it alone is fine for some; however, most who begin a new program of exercise are more likely to stay with it if they have very good social support from family or friends. Families committed to the fitness of individual members should consider exercising together.